

Alternatives to Violence Project

Evaluation of the Project Officer Position October 2007

Introduction

This paper describes the decisions of AVPWA to employ project Officer and the basic outcomes of the project. It had been written as a result of an evaluation of the project undertaken by members of the current AVP Management Committee in consultation with the Project Officer employed. It concludes with some recommendations for future considerations and actions for the AVP WA Management Committee.

Project Officer Position

AVP Management committee decided in early April 2006 to employ a project officer with the main focus being finding participants for community workshops. At a special meeting for the purpose, we devised a framework for progressing this project, including hours/pay/conditions, job description, advertising, a selection panel and a timeline. The advertisement went out mostly via email networks to every group we could muster, at the end of April. (See Appendix 1) The job was to be for six months: July to November, 2006. Funding for this special project came largely from a grant and would amount to a total of \$8,700.

We received quite a few enquiries, but only six applications. We decided on a short list of four. David Nourish, Sally Herzfeld and Jo Vallentine made up the interview panel. Jim Thom was contact person, sending out details on request. Interviews were conducted in May/June, 2006.

The interviewees all offered part of what we were looking for: someone who could network with fertile ground in like-minded groups, to encourage more active participation in our community workshops. We had had a series of workshop cancellations which were very dispiriting all round. Knowing that we have a good product, we felt sure that if only someone had time to make direct personal connections with all the people already interested in building community and finding peaceful ways to solve conflicts, then more people would want to do our workshops.

Anna Alderson, already known to us, and having an extensive community network, was selected for the position. She agreed to go through the three levels of workshop as soon as possible. A contract was signed on June 12th, 2006, when Anna was welcomed to the team. The working date was extended from November until March 2007, as all agreed that more time was needed.

What the Project Officer Did

Over a period of 6-9 months the Project Officer explored a number of options. The following is a brief summary of what was done. The monthly reports to the management committee are attached.

1. Contacted organisations/agencies identified as being 'like-minded' i.e. apparently interested in a similar clientele, having a similar philosophy about violence/peace, or with similar social/cultural concerns e.g. UnitingCare West, Relationships Australia, C-BERS, Kinway.
2. Contacted umbrella groups that potentially would reach a number of member groups/organisations that might be interested in AVP workshops for their members e.g. WACOSS, WISH, Learning Centre Link.

3. Contacted government departments that might have an interest in AVP e.g. Office of Crime Prevention.
4. Contacted local community centres as possible bases for offering AVP workshops. In particular I worked with Loftus Community Centre where, because of the connection with the coordinator, we offered a number of variations e.g. a full weekend workshop, a workshop over a whole term, once week, a 'taster', a presentation at the term 1 community lunch, and a booth at the annual Open Day.
5. Contacted TAFE Colleges after interest shown by Balga TAFE.
6. Personal contacts with people I already knew from other contexts were also explored even if they didn't fit the above categories e.g. Fremantle Community Health Service.
7. A data base with possible contacts (based on the above) was built up and many attempts at contact were made.
8. Worked with Lyn Hicks from Bicton, Jim Thom and other facilitators, to run a number of AVP workshops for many of Lyn's contacts.
9. Fremantle newspapers were contacted about Bicton workshops and Fremantle Community News, through a contact with Kelli, ran an article. The Voice in the northern suburbs was contacted about LCC workshops and publicised them in their community news.
10. Relevant/appropriate local business in Bicton and Leederville were approached and some agreed to have cards with information about forthcoming workshops displayed.
11. Contacted local radio stations viz. RTRFM, 6NRCurtin Radio and Radio Fremantle to try to get them to broadcast information out about AVP. Curtin Radio, where there are people who know Jo, gave us an interview and publicised up-coming AVP workshops on two occasions.

What Hasn't Worked (Negatives)

1. Like-minded organisations are just that – they are like-minded, but they have their own particular purpose which is not identical to that of AVP. Their main interest is in what they are doing – not necessarily in what AVP is doing or can do. Their responses have ranged from very interested to totally dismissive, but even where an individual was interested they have not managed to engage the rest of their organisation e.g. Amnesty International. Most of their members only seem to have the energy to devote to one or two organisations (a factor borne out by recent research on volunteers) and are already committed (or over-committed!).
2. Organisations that support member groups, while happy to offer AVP workshops to their members cannot guarantee uptake. WACOSS was enthusiastic about AVP and thought it would appeal to its members and so scheduled two sessions this year. The first was cancelled because of low numbers – and we don't yet know if the next one will run.
3. The same is true of local community centres who may be happy to offer AVP workshops as one of the services to their clients, but will not continue to offer them if the local community does not respond positively. In all the variations we offered at Loftus CC (see above) there was occasional polite interest but nothing generated any sort of real enthusiasm. If Loftus CC is any thing to go by (and it does seem to be very typical) their membership is primarily mothers with young children and seniors. While many of these seem to think AVP would be good for their brothers, husbands, sons or neighbours, they

don't seem to see it as suitable for themselves and they don't seem to be able to get these others to attend (perhaps not surprisingly!)

4. In large organisations or government departments finding a suitable person to talk to is almost impossible unless one already has a contact there. Even where a contact had connected us they may not stay e.g. at Balga TAFE even though I followed up quickly from a phone contact to us at the office, the original person had moved – and although the person I spoke to was interested they never followed through with any offers. There is further evidence of this in the prisons where it would probably be impossible to penetrate without prior contacts.
5. Volunteering, even in a membership sense seems to be increasingly 'episodic' i.e. people come and stay for a while, and then move on (again borne out by recent research - and verified by our own experience with AVP volunteer facilitators).
6. The service we are offering is, in many respects, very similar to others. So, for example, there are many organisations and individual facilitators offering workshops on 'communication', 'co-operation', 'conflict resolution', and 'community building'. Many of them seek to build 'affirmation', 'peace', 'forgiveness', 'empowerment' and 'trust', to deal with 'fear', 'anger', 'stereotyping' and 'powerlessness', often using the same or similar activities and strategies used by AVP. Taken as a whole, AVP is probably still unique but it's not easy to convince others that it is. Nor is it probably as distinct as it was when it first began. This means there are many more competitors for AVP's 'products' and potential 'customers'.
7. Local radio has proved to be difficult to penetrate, especially RTRFM which seemed to be an obvious target – they have just not responded at all. Curtin Radio, where we had ready access, still only generated 2 calls and no bookings. Stories in local newspapers didn't seem to generate bookings either. Fremantle Community News, through a contact with Kelli, ran an article and the Voice was contacted about the LCC workshops but no enrolments ensued from any of these. Not convinced that promotion and advertising are the way to go unless it is possible to do it for a sustained period in a number of different ways.

What Seems to Have Worked (Positives)

What seems to have worked this year has been using a key person who had approached us e.g. Lyn Wicks in Fremantle, the East Timorese group, the contacts in Denmark, Shane and Sally's contacts in Midland, prisoners in Acacia - who are able to generate people who will attend and work with them to run as many basic, advanced and T4F (the latter combined with other groups) as they are able to fill. We have provided support for registration, advertising, venues, catering, and facilitators

Recommendations

1. Focus our efforts on groups with specific needs e.g.
 - indigenous groups (with caveats about the need for cultural sensitivity and appropriateness),
 - domestic violence groups (with caveats about the psychological dimensions of DV that groups who work with DV offenders and victims stress and the danger of doing further harm to victims if we are not very careful)
 - Outcare and other released prisoner support groups
 - specific refugee/migrant groups such as the East Timorese.
2. Focus on people who are likely to have time, rather than those who are already very busy and committed.

3. Be flexible in the programs we offer e.g.
 - offering sections separately and/or spaced over time
 - 'tasters' as a way of introducing the potential of AVP
 - Adapt to fit already pre-determined meeting times
4. Develop a package of what we can provide for a group or individual who want to run an AVP workshop i.e.
 - a timeline of steps to take in running an AVP workshop,
 - what needs to be provided e.g. venue, catering, publicity, registration etc.
 - a negotiation process for what needs to take place between AVP and the individual/group.
5. Keep current AVP membership interested - maybe survey them about what they need/want.
6. Invite 'tame' people with specific skills e.g. public relations, events management to a committee meeting to review what we have already done and find out what they think could be done differently – and possibly employ them on a short term basis for a specific task if their ideas seem reasonable.
7. Consider employing another Project Officer e.g. a key person from a specific 'special needs' group.

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October 2007

Appendix 1 – Job Description

PROJECT OFFICER

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a conflict resolution group that runs workshops in prisons, schools and for the general community. We are looking for a motivated and energetic person who is in sympathy with the philosophy of the organization to undertake market analysis and promotion of AVP.

The position is initially for a period of five months (June – October 2006) with payment of \$25.00 an hour for 16 hours per week. The office is located in Mount Lawley, working times are flexible but attendance at management committee meetings one evening per month will be essential. Cross cultural experience desirable. Own ABN and ability to contract will be an advantage.

For more information and selection criteria email jovall@iinet.net.au or phone 08 9371 5407 (voice mail). Applications in writing to AVP-WA, PO Box 721, Mount Lawley 6050 by close of business on Friday May 12th.

Appendix 2

JOB DESCRIPTION

The project officer will report to the management committee of AVP-WA. This is a group of about eight people who currently meet on the third Wednesday of each month at 5.30 pm for about 3 hours. Attendance at these meetings would be essential. The committee is composed of voluntary AVP facilitators. Other than this, contact would be mainly by phone or email. Our office is located in Mount Lawley although it is envisaged that some work may be able to be done from home.

We hope that the Project Officer will be able to increase our community profile and enrol participants for conflict resolution workshops. There will be a limited budget for this so paid advertising will not be the main focus. Contact with groups - perhaps other community organisations, religious bodies, businesses, schools and the government sector, offering introductory sessions would be one of the major functions. The actual introductory sessions would be carried out by AVP facilitators. Mailouts, both by post and email, advertising or articles in the local press, organising radio announcements or interviews would also be important.

The ability to articulate clearly and enthusiastically the value of AVP is vital. Therefore it is essential that the project officer understand what an AVP workshop is like and aims to do. Previous participation in an AVP workshop may be an advantage. A short précis of AVP is enclosed.

The period of employment will commence in June, with a two month probationary period, and end in October. We are a low budget organisation and this project is an experiment to see if we can be more effective in holding community workshops. Future employment depends in part on the success of the project and availability of funds.

SELECTION CRITERIA

- Interest in conflict resolution and sympathy with the aims of the Alternatives to Violence Project.
- Ability to work creatively and unsupervised within the guidelines and parameters set by the management committee.
- Comfortable working with a non sectarian, voluntary, community organization that runs workshops in the prison system.
- Some experience in cross cultural or multi-faith situations.
- Good oral and written communication skills.
- Marketing and budgeting skills
- Ability to use basic computer programs and email.
- Understanding of networking and ability to use these channels to disperse information.
- Easy access to email at home.
- Own transport with current C class licence.
- Own ABN and ability to contract preferred.